

COUNTRY China

SUBJECT Chinese Communist Attitude Concerning Curricula
in Institutions of Higher Learning

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1. A major issue of Chinese Communist policy which has not yet been resolved is the choice of curricula for institutions of higher learning. The Chinese Communists take the position that the liberal arts institutions have not, during the decades since the Revolution of 1911, produced many persons able to take active part in or to supervise effectively the practical work necessary to develop a prosperous China. The Communists distrust the concept of a liberal education. In addition, they point to the immediate need for the training of technicians and professional men for reconstruction and the administration of the government. (In mid-1950 they estimated the need for such purposes to be 22,000 college graduates. In the summer of 1950, 17,000 students finished college. It is not known how many are now employed by the government.) For these reasons they want to abolish the universities with liberal arts courses and establish instead many technical and professional colleges.
2. Already many institutions have been established according to these principles. The Harbin Industrial College, for example, is organized into functional departments on a basis which, from a normal academic point of view, appears very odd. Following two years of Russian language, the student specializes in a division such as the Tractor Department. The "University of the People," which was opened during the late summer of 1950 in Peking, is organized on a professional or technical basis, and not according to academic disciplines. Departments have such titles as the following: accounting, public finance, international trade, statistics. There are no liberal arts courses.
3. The intellectuals and liberals among the democratic personages in Peking and elsewhere point out the dangers which will result from the elimination of the liberal arts universities. They admit that in the past the universities have produced few persons willing and able to take an active part in the hard work of developing the country, and agree to the present need for a large number of technicians. However, looking beyond the immediate need, they anticipate the effects of a swing to the other extreme. The professional schools will produce, in effect, tools without a brain. The emphasis of a narrow technical education ultimately will cause trouble for the New China, as there will be a very serious shortage of young people who have the breadth of vision necessary to become future leaders.

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4. In Peking in April and May 1950 there was a long and bitter debate between the Communist leaders desiring the substitution of technical and professional training, and the intellectuals, including the Democratic League, favoring retention of the present liberal arts institutions. The intellectuals protested so vehemently that the Communists informed the universities that they could maintain their present system, but that within three years they must adopt a curriculum which will produce well-trained technicians and professional men. Thus for the present many departments such as philosophy have survived.
5. The intellectuals are continuing to press their point of view. It has, however, become expedient to fight indirectly. The intellectuals pursue the theme that for technical progress, narrow professional training is not enough. A German physicist who has studied the German V-2 rockets and who can quote from German scientific literature on that subject has stated that such technical developments as these are not possible without close cooperation of many departments such as physics, chemistry, and the other scientific disciplines. These departments exist only in the modern liberal arts university.
6. Thus the universities have not yet been destroyed by the Communist Government, although much emphasis has been placed on technical and professional training. During the past few months the government has come to realize that institutions for political indoctrination, such as Nan Fung University in Canton, cannot take the place of the orthodox universities. This realization has come slowly and it is not yet clear how deeply it is felt by the Communists.

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